


Hon John Wise,
Minister of Agriculture,
Mr. Brian Mulroney,
Prime Minister,
House of Commons,
Ottawa.

4-190 Powell Ave
Ottawa. K1S 2A5
27 July 1985



re: Pesticides and people with chemical sensitivities

Mr. Wise,

I was amazed at the lack of awareness and dangerously slow response of your department on an issue of concern to many thousands of Canadians, some of whom are being placed in immediate danger by your department's actions.

I was also amazed at the discourteous and inattentive response of one of your ministerial staff to my expression of concern. A staff member in the PMO was also unresponsive and insulting when taking my complaint, when I called that day after being informed that no-one with any decision making power in Agriculture Canada was in Ottawa. (Another situation I find incomprehensible.)

First let me describe the incident which raised my concern in the first place.

I suffered a strong neurological reaction to an exposure to a pesticide approved by your department.

On Thursday, 18 July 1985, I was working in my office (at home) and was feeling a little out of sorts. I had a feeling of growing anxiety throughout the day, and by evening, felt very anxious. I was also experiencing great difficulty writing, as I seemed to have lost co-ordination of the muscles in my right wrist and hand. I won't mention what other problems this caused.

Because I have chemical sensitivities, and because I often have an anxiety reaction to petrochemicals and some solvents, I thought that perhaps this was what was happening. But the reaction was very severe and unlike any reaction that I can remember, so I had no idea specifically what it was from.

On Friday, a client returned some work I did for him Thursday, and I agreed with him that it was wandering, and that it contained an inappropriate air of anxiety.

You might imagine my concern.

I remembered that my landlord had planned to spray for earwigs in kitchens and bathrooms, but he had agreed not to spray in my apartment because he is aware of my having environmental illness, and he is a very accommodating and reasonable person.

I thought maybe he had sprayed bushes outside the window where I work, and that I was reacting to the spray.

So, on Saturday, I went to the country, where I felt a lot

better, though not completely. On returning to my apartment Saturday night, the same symptoms set in. Also, I was reacting more severely to other chemicals, such as car exhaust, than I had prior to Thursday.

Knowing that my landlord had been concerned about earwigs on the ground floor of the building, I suspected he would have sprayed near the front and side doors. It might sound funny, but I went to the doorways and sniffed around.

I could smell an oily smell, and a regional municipality worker who works with pesticides told me it was a common pesticide used to kill earwigs. The presence of Diazanone was later confirmed by my landlord. It had been applied Wednesday.

When I inhaled these fumes, the symptoms worsened.

On Sunday, I asked my landlord for a sample of the pesticide, so that I could have my doctor test me in an objective setting to confirm my suspicion. He gave me a sample of Diazanone, the pesticide used, and informed me that he had cleaned out his spraying equipment underneath my window. My doctor informed me that it is pointless to test for pesticide, as it's very dangerous for people with sensitivities, and that I'm almost certainly sensitive to it.

I realized that thousands of people have the problem of environmental illness, and that hundreds of people are using Diazanone to get rid of earwigs in built-up areas of Ottawa.

This presents a tremendous health hazard to people who have or would develop environmental illness, and I wanted to inform Agriculture Canada of the health hazard, and ask that they issue a warning to users, as they seem to be ignorant on the matter.

I phoned the pesticide branch of the department, and spoke with Janet Taylor. I explained my concern about what had happened to my own health, and about how others might develop environmental illness as a result of diazanone exposure, especially considering its widespread use as a result of the increased earwig population in the Ottawa area.

I asked that an immediate warning be issued to protect others, either those with environmental illness, or those who might develop it as a result of an exposure.

The response was not, in my opinion, appropriate for the seriousness of the health risk. The response was that she would send a letter asking me more about what happened, in the meantime doing nothing to protect others.

I considered this irresponsible, so I called the Minister's office of Agriculture Canada, and spoke with T.J. Clifford. I found Mr. Clifford unconcerned, insulting, and his behaviour peculiar.

He said nothing could be done to protect others, something I know is not the case.

He said the problem is not that serious, something I know is not the case.

In handling my call, when he was reading back a summary of what I'd said, he was reading some statements that were unconnected with my comments, points he was mistakenly reading from 'another file on his desk'. We'd only talked for about ten minutes, so I hardly think he was paying attention.

At one point he said, with reference to my call to Janet Taylor, as a statement, 'You called her and talked to her and she's not in.' I explained that in order to talk with her she had to be in.

He said there was nothing that could be done because the people who make decisions were all away at a conference.

In short, I was not overly impressed with his competence, and was outraged at his seeming lack of concern.

Perhaps he was bored with the idea of being concerned about the health of Canadians, as he also yawned several times.

So then I called the communications branch of Agriculture Canada, more than a little angry by this time. I spoke with Mrs. J.A. Sorel. She informed me that she was very familiar with my problem and that Agriculture Canada was doing something about it.

The department had formed a committee.

That's all, despite the fact that people have died as a result of environmental illness, and that Canadians are becoming disabled with environmental illness as a result of normal practices within her department.

Then she said she served on the selection board choosing people for the committee, and that she knew my concerns were well represented on that committee.

Then she told me she had never heard of environmental illness, and that the term had never been mentioned when the committee was formed.

When I asked her how she felt my concerns were represented when she had never heard of my illness, she said I was being insulting.

I do not consider the formation of a committee 'action' when a group of Canadians are dying, when other people are being physically and mentally disabled by government action, and when these facts are clearly documented in standard medical literature which is available to the government and essential to the safe dispatch of government activities in many departments.

So I called the PMO and spoke with Ian Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton was equally insulting, saying such patronizing things as "When did you come in contact with the alleged quote unquote pesticide", and, when I said I had had a

reaction to the pesticide, he questioned my ability to know when I'm having a reaction to a substance by saying "I suppose you have some medical experience in order to know what was happening", and other comments implying that I didn't know what I was talking about.

I said to Mr. Hamilton that "If you are in a room full of paint fumes and you feel dizzy, and you go outside and feel better, and then feel dizzy again when you come back into the room, you don't need a doctor to tell you you're reacting to the paint fumes." His response - "I suppose your entitled to your opinion."

It does not take a doctor to tell me I'm having a reaction any more than it would to confirm that someone is standing on my foot. Thank you Mr. Hamilton.

In my humble and uneducated opinion, the federal government is being irresponsible, perhaps even criminally negligent, in not taking into consideration the concerns of people who have or will develop environmental illness as a result of the activities of several departments, Agriculture Canada being only one of them. That's a long term fight, one that will probably be before the Canadian and Ontario Human Rights Commissions within the year, under discrimination against a handicap and right to security and dignity provisions of Canadian and Ontario human rights legislation.

However, the real problem is bigotry and ignorance on the part of the government and public servants about chemical sensitivities and environmental illness, and a lack of concern for increasing numbers of Canadians who will develop the illness as a direct result of government action.

There is ample evidence in the literature about chemical sensitivities, and about their very serious effects. There have been many representations to the government on this issue, and yet nothing has been done to stop more and more people from becoming burdened with this disability, with the exception of the partially useful UFFI removal program, which addresses just a tiny aspect of the problem.

In the opinion of legal counsel, further government action leading to disability will be actionable.

I ask the Agriculture Minister, and I ask the Prime Minister, civilly,

- 1) What immediate warning will be issued to protect people with the handicap of environmental illness from the effects of pesticides approved by Agriculture Canada and used in built up areas, especially considering the earwig panic in Eastern Ontario?
- 2) What program of activity will be undertaken, with budgets, dates, and personnel allocations, to incorporate the concerns of people who have or will develop the handicap of environmental illness in the testing and approval process pesticides are subjected to?
- 3) What reparations will be made to people who have either developed environmental illness as a result of exposure to pesticides approved by the crown, or who, already

having environmental illness, have had their illness exacerbated by pesticide exposure?

- 4) What steps will be taken to prevent other Canadians from developing environmental illness as a result of pesticide exposure?
- 5) What section of Agriculture Canada will be responsible, on an ongoing basis, to keep the department familiar with the needs of people with environmental illness, and to make sure policies and practices of Agriculture Canada do not cause more Canadians to become handicapped with environmental illness?
- 6) What consciousness-raising work will be done by the federal government to the end that agents of the crown stop treating people with environmental illness like children who are making a lot out of nothing, when in fact several people have died from this illness and others have become seriously disabled while the government is doing nothing to come to terms with the problem.

I thank you for your attention.

Chris Brown

cc. Brian Mulroney, PM

Ian Hamilton, PMO

Janet Taylor, Agriculture Canada

T.J. Clifford, Agriculture Canada

J.A. Sorel, Agriculture Canada

Michael Cassidy, M.P.

Dr. Henry Gaspmann, Environmental Health Cttee, OMA

Peter Fraser, Executive Director, OMA

Hon Murray Elston, Ontario Minister of Health

Susan Wright, Joke Epp's office

Lynda Brooks, Human Ecology Foundation of Canada

Diane Fecteau, CHRC (security and dignity of individual)

Linda Ackroyd, OHRC (discrimination against handicap)

Dr. Magwood, Ottawa-Carleton Regional Health Unit

CFRA, CJSB, CBO, CKOY, CFGO,

CBOT, CJOH, CIII,

CP, BN,

Ottawa Citizen

le Droit

Maclean's

Globe and Mail